

John 12:20-33

“Here Now...Believe Later”

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After a loved one has died, often the things they said or did in this life come back to remind us of the life lessons we gleaned from having spent time with one another.

- Maybe it was words of instruction from a parent that didn't make sense when first offered to teenage you.
- Maybe it was words of comfort and consolation spoken by a spouse when times were tough early in the marriage.
- Maybe it was a teacher or professor who helped put your life on the course it is now on and assisted you with finding your passion and utilizing the God-given gifts you possess to change the world for the better.
- And, hey, while we're at it, let's not forget to mention that maybe the things we are saying and doing in life may one day be the words the people we interact with will recall after we're gone from this life.

Who we are – what we say and do – impacts the people around us – and is often recalled long after face-to-face interaction is over.

Jesus' first century disciples and followers understood this better than anyone.

My hunch is this, that as Jesus would speak, they were thinking, *“this probably should be making more sense; after all it's been close to three years we've been together”* – then later realizing - it didn't fully make sense until Jesus was gone from their sight – and the Holy Spirit began to fill in the gaps.

This accords with the Fourth Evangelist's Gospel, for John mentions this very fact in Chapter 14 when Jesus, just before his death, after washing the disciples' feet, declares,

“These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” (John 14:25-26)

As Jesus quipped his self-revelatory remarks, those disciples and other first century followers often found themselves standing on the ellipsis of faith – right in the middle of *Here Now ... Believe Later*.

So, what did they hear?

And, how does it shape belief?

They heard Jesus delve into his death's meaning and the urgency of his impending hour – beginning with an agricultural parable.

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12.23-24)

The seed imagery recalls for us the sowing parables of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8).

John's seed imagery, however, seems to be independent of the other three Gospels.

The closest resemblance to John can be found by The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:37-38. That said, John is still quite distinct from Paul in that Paul uses it to interpret the resurrected body and John uses it as Jesus' way to interpret his death.

The significance, for John, is found in the contrast between a small word *menei* with big ramifications **polyn karpon pherei** as in, "...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, *it remains(menei) just a single grain; but if it dies, it (polyn karpon pherei) bears much fruit.*"

Fruit, according to John, is Jesus' metaphor for the faith community's life (cf. John 15.1-8). John's Jesus, then, is using this imagery to show the salvific power of his death resides in the community which is gathered as a result of his death.

This verse (24) speaks metaphorically what verse 32 states directly,
"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself."

It carries with it a double meaning:

It is a description of the upcoming crucifixion.

It also describes Jesus exaltation at the ascension when Jesus returns to God.

The positive effect of Jesus' urgent hour as described here in John is how it highlights the universal offer of salvation available to all in Jesus the Christ.

Keeping in mind that it is our response to Jesus' offer which sets the limits – not Jesus.

This, in turn, leads to one of Jesus' best attested sayings, regarding contrasting attitudes toward one's life.
"Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (John 12.25)

A form of this saying occurs five times in the Synoptics (Mt. 10, 16; Mk 10; Lk 9, 17).

Yet, as is often the case, it addresses significantly different elements in each Gospel which are important to each evangelist's theological statement.

Here, in John, this saying is cast against the backdrop of Jesus' death and carries special significance because the Gospel writer uses the same word to describe the community's response and the gift Jesus will offer – *psyche* (life).

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10.11)

To love one's life is opposite of Jesus' action; it places one outside of the community shaped by Jesus' gift of his life, which leads to the loss of life.

The antithesis of verse 25 reinforces this idea when it purports to hate one's life *in this world* is a declaration of one's allegiance to Jesus, and so to receive Jesus' gift of eternal life.

"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10.28)

Those who love life are those who are attached to the things of this world.

Those who want to become rich and famous and powerful – no matter the cost.

Material Goods and worldly achievements stop at the grave.

As George Strait sings, "I ain't seen a hearse with a luggage rack."

Let's be clear – being rich, famous and powerful are not anti-Jesus – the pursuit of them no matter the cost and using people as resources to get there however is.

The key to loving life by losing it...to hating life in this world thereby keeping eternal life...entails how we look at the world around us – and by extension the people of this world.

As St. Teresa of Avila puts it:

Christ has no body now but yours.

No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which He looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands with which He blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet.

Yours are the eyes, you are His body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

It's about community.

You'll recall how the 4th Evangelist's end vision is a community shaped by love & grounded in relationship to Jesus.

It's about finding and creating meaningful, significant, life-giving encounters.

On this kick-off Sunday, we do well to remember that on our best day this is what it means to be the church.

As faithful followers / dedicated disciples, we strive to create in this house of worship a bit of heaven on earth.

When we lift that communal vision up for the world to see it is bound to bear fruit.

And if we might have difficulty seeing this outcome now, then may we simply rest in the reality that sometimes believing later comes as a result of simply being here now.

Alleluia & Amen!